

INTUITIVE AND ABSTRACTIVE KNOWLEDGE: FROM DUNS SCOTUS TO JOHN CALVIN

REV. THOMAS F. TORRANCE

My concern in this lecture is not to investigate the whole theory of knowledge proposed by John of Duns but to direct attention to certain features in his conception of intuitive and abstractive knowledge which helped to create ferment and introduce the change that eventually came to fruition in the sixteenth century. For this purpose I would like to add some comments on this conception in the light of certain reactions to it in the thought of William of Occam and of John Major leading up to the teaching of John Calvin.

The general position of Duns Scotus can be fixed, on the one hand, by his rejection of St. Augustine's doctrine of the special illumination of the human intellect by the uncreated light of God, and, on the other hand, by his rejection of St. Thomas' speculative theology elaborated from sense-experience¹. His stand against both of these positions was taken in the interest of the objectivity of our knowledge. Over against the notion of a divine light in the mind, Duns held that in His knowing of things God confers upon them an intelligibility in themselves (*esse intelligibile*) which shines forth and moves the intellect to apprehend them and on the ground of which the intellect may derive rational notions from them². And over against the view that the intellect knows singular things only indirectly through the universals it abstracts from them, Duns held that it knows them directly and not merely through reflexion on the phantasm, that is, without intervening

¹ Ord. I d. 3 pars 1 q. 3. 4.

² Ord. I d. 3 pars 1 q. 4, et d. 43 q. un.

images - in any case, he argued, it is impossible to abstract universals from singulars without previous knowledge of the singulars³.

The effect of this was to throw the main weight in his theory of knowledge upon intuitive apprehension of a thing in its actual and evident existence and according to its distinctive nature which gives it its reality (*ultima realitas entis*) and its separate existence (*per se existens*), i.e. *entitas individuans*, *proprietas individui*, *haecceitas*, as he variously spoke of it⁴. Thus while Duns agreed with Aquinas in holding that our actual knowledge starts from sense-experience and not innate ideas, and in holding that scientific knowledge is concerned with the process of abstracting and considering universals, he concentrated upon the concrete and specific existence of singular things in their individuations where he claimed their essence was to be found and the objective reference for our universal concepts was rooted⁵. That is to say, he made intuitive knowledge primary, and abstractive knowledge secondary, for while abstractive knowledge is of some essence pre-scinded from the existence of a thing and not of the thing itself, intuitive knowledge is the direct knowledge of an actually existent object in its completeness apprehended as it is in itself (*sicut est in se*), as something intelligible in itself (*per se intelligibile*) and therefore in accordance with its rational mode of being (*ratio entis*)⁶. Compared to this abstractive knowledge is imperfect:

«Omnis intellectio abstractiva et non-intuitiva est aliquo modo imperfecta; cognitio autem intuitiva est obiecti ut obiectum est praesens in existentia actuali»⁷.

This naturally gives a very important place in our knowledge to contingent propositions dealing with events in the external world and to their order, in which we express our basic contact with real things⁸. They embody concepts of the first intention (*intentio prima*) with a direct reference to a really existent entity

³ Ord. I d. 3 pars 3 q. 1. 2; II d. 3 q. 6. 9; d. 9 q. 2; d. 1 q. 1; IV d. 45 q. 1; De an. q. 22 n. 3.

⁴ Ord. II d. 3 q. 5-6; Rep. II d. 11 q. 8; d. 12 q. 5. 8; In Metaph. VII q. 13.

⁵ In Metaph. VII q. 14 n. 5; q. 18 n. 5. 8. 10; Rep. II d. 12 q. 5. 8; Ord. II d. 42 q. 4 n. 7.

⁶ Ord. I d. 2 n. 394; d. 3 n. 116. 137. 171-174; II d. 3 q. 9 n. 6; d. 9 q. 2 n. 29; IV d. 49 q. 8 n. 6; Quodl. q. 7 n. 8; q. 13 n. 8; q. 14 n. 10. 12. 13.

⁷ Ord. I d. 2 n. 394; cf. Rep. IV d. 10 q. 9 n. 4; In Metaph. VII q. 15 n. 4.

⁸ Ord. prol. n. 169; I d. 3 n. 238; d. 8 n. 300.

or to some real aspect of a thing that is (*ens in se*), and not just concepts of the second intention (*intentio secunda*) which stand for some entity that exists only in the understanding (*ens rationis*), considering it without objective reference to any actuality beyond it⁹. Hence, according to Duns, the primary natural object of the intellect is not the essence or quiddity of a thing as such, abstracted from its existence, but being («ens est primum obiectum intellectus nostri»)¹⁰, whether it be material or spiritual, not this or that being, but being as such («primum obiectum intellectus nostri naturale est ens in quantum ens»)¹¹. Every concept we have of things, material or immaterial, carries with it an epistemological relation to being itself¹².

On the other hand, when we ask how we form our idea of being, Duns admits that we have considerable difficulty, for our intuitive apprehension of things is vague and confused and we have to rely upon abstractive processes. We cannot blame the things themselves for this, any more than we can blame the sun if we cannot see properly, for the things remain intelligible in themselves; rather is it we who suffer from weakness and imperfection in our understanding owing to sin which has introduced an element of refraction between our intellect and its primary adequate object¹³. Hence in our present condition we have to subject our first *intentiones* of simple things to discursive treatment. It is then the business of *scientia* to organise the formal distinctions we derive from our experience of things and their positive intelligible properties, and to develop our understanding of their relations and implications in conceptions of the second intention that are necessarily true independent of the sense-experience that first gave occasion for them¹⁴. That is to say, we compound our terms in such a way that the intellect can immediately assent to the complex proposition as self-evidently true like a first principle. In this way we may reach valid ideas above the illusions of sense-experience

⁹ Ord. I d. 23 q. un.; II d. 3 q. 1 n. 7.

¹⁰ Ord. prol. n. 1; I d. 3 n. 118. 137. 171-174.

¹¹ Ord. prol. n. 1.

¹² Ord. I d. 3 n. 80; II d. 1 q. 4 n. 2. 26; Quodl. q. 3 n. 2.

¹³ Ord. II d. 3 q. 6 n. 17; Rep. II d. 12 q. 8 n. 3. 10; In Metaph. VII q. 13 n. 23.

¹⁴ In Metaph. II q. 1 n. 2; Ord. I d. 3 n. 230-234.

and the imperfect intuitions of the mind, ideas that remain valid even when the objects of our experience and intuition no longer remain present or existent¹⁵. At first sight it might appear that what Duns is doing here is to redact the truth of things and therefore all signification to the *veritas compositionis*, as if the truth of first principles could be resolved without remainder into the intrinsic truth of the propositions expressing them, that is, into the relations of the terms to one another and to the propositions in which they are validly combined¹⁶. This would, however, be in contradiction to the contention that *ens in quantum ens* is the natural adequate object of the intellect and that intuitive knowledge is primary. What he surely means is that the complex depends for its truth ultimately upon a reference beyond itself to *being* and therefore does not depend completely upon its own intrinsic consistency. That is to say, the intellect would assent to a complex of terms or propositions as true, and not only as formally or logically valid, provided that it contained at least one first intention or basic proposition that was immediately self-evident to the intuitive apprehension.

All this implies that there is more in the concept of being than we can derive abstractively and logically. Being itself is ultimately indefinable¹⁷; it is not fully accessible to formalisation in logical terms, while science by its abstractive nature treats only of *passiones entis*, not of *ens* itself¹⁸. As I understand it, this is the real significance of Duns' much debated notion of the univocity of being, which holds good only when we speak *logically*, in formal terms of the second intention, and not when we speak *metaphysically*¹⁹. When in logic we organise our statements consistently on the same level we are treating our concepts in abstraction from their ontological reference and therefore within the same generic formalisms where univocity obtains, but when we think metaphy-

¹⁵ *Ord.* II d. 3 q. 9 n. 6: «Scientia autem est obiecti, secundum quod abstrahit ab existentia actuali, alioquin scientia posset quandoque esse et quandoque non esse, et ita non esset perpetua, sed corrupta re, corruptum peretur scientia illius rei, quod falsum est». Cf. also *Quodl.* q. 7 n. 9; *Rep.* II d. 3 q. 3 n. 10.

¹⁶ *Ord.* I d. 2 n. 15-17; d. 3 n. 230-234.

¹⁷ *Quodl.* q. 7 n. 14.

¹⁸ *Ord.* I d. 3 n. 134-136; II d. 3 q. 9 n. 10; cf. q. 1 n. 7.

¹⁹ *Ord.* I d. 3 n. 129-166; d. 8 n. 39-42; *De an.* q. 21 n. 14.

sically we think *naturally*, or in accordance with the nature of being, where God and the creature are utterly diverse²⁰. «Deus et creatura in nullo genere sunt». What Duns Scotus is saying, therefore, is that we cannot logicalise the relation between our logical formalisation of the concept of being and being itself, without redacting the truth of being to the truth of statement; (apart from the inherent impossibility of this) this would mean that knowledge of God could be reduced completely to logical and linguistic forms, whereas our knowledge of the divine Being cannot be exhausted by logical or univocal formalisations²¹. The upshot of this is to show that abstractive knowledge is limited and imperfect, and that logical thinking has a *boundary* beyond which it cannot go, while it is in objective reference to being beyond that boundary that authentic knowledge (*intelligere proprie*) is grounded²².

Now since the intellect, metaphysically speaking, has being for its primary object, it is not tied down to determinate objects in the sensible world but is capable of an act of knowledge that transcends the sensible and reaches up to immaterial realities, yet on account of our present state and the punitive justice meted out upon our original sin, we are incapable of direct intuitive knowledge of these, even of our own soul²³. Theologically speaking, the intellect has God for its proper and ultimate object and should be capable of an act of knowledge that reaches out to Him, without discursive activity, *per modum entis*²⁴, but it is impeded both by its own infirmity and by the exalted nature of the divine object²⁵. Abstractively, it is restricted to the knowledge of God as First Cause, or rather as First Being, gained obliquely through a consideration of His effects in the created world²⁶: but this is not to be regarded as a knowledge caused by created realities for in that event we would never be able to rise beyond what was necessarily

²⁰ Ord. I d. 8 n. 82: «Deus et creatura... sunt... primo diversa in realitate, quia in nulla realitate conveniunt»; see also n. 106-107. 136; Rep. I d. 3 q. 1 n. 4. 5. 6.

²¹ Ord. I d. 2 n. 25; d. 3 n. 57. 25.

²² Ord. IV d. 43 q. 2 n. 6-11. - Cf. Rep. I d. 8 q. 5 n. 13; «Quidquid enim dicitur de Deo, est formaliter transcendens».

²³ Ord. I d. 3 n. 113-115; II d. 3 q. 8 n. 13; Rep. II d. 3 q. 3 n. 14.

²⁴ Ord. II d. 3 q. 9 n. 6.

²⁵ Ord. prol. n. 200-203; IV d. 49 q. 11 n. 3; Rep. I d. 36 q. 2 n. 8.

²⁶ Ord. prol. n. 47-48; I d. 2 n. 35-36; d. 3 n. 9. 100; Rep. prol. q. 2 lat. n. 21; q. 3 n. 1. 6; Quodl. q. 14 n. 10. 11. 21. 22.

related to them and could only construe God in accordance with them²⁷. Intuitively, however, the intellect is quite incapable of cognising God naturally in a proper and particular manner, *ut haec essentia in se*²⁸.

What precisely does Duns mean by *intuitive knowledge* in this context? As opposed to abstractive knowledge which treats discursively of an image representing some object, irrespective of whether it is present or not or even whether it exists or not, intuitive knowledge is the simple, face to face (*facie ad faciem*) cognition of the essence of a present object in accordance with its actual existence and as it is in itself²⁹. His understanding of this is guided by what he finds in 'facial' vision or sense-perception³⁰. On that analogy he thinks of intuitive cognition as *caused* in the understanding (*causari in intellectu*) from the side of the object through its actual existence and presence³¹, so that the understanding has necessarily in itself a real and actual relation binding it to the object itself («in se necessario habet annexam relationem realem et actualem ad ipsum obiectum») ³².

In relating this to knowledge of God, Duns draws two important distinctions, between perfect and imperfect intuition, and between a voluntary and a natural object. In perfect intuitive knowledge the object is always present and is its own evidence, while in imperfect intuitive knowledge the object may be remembered or anticipated, but without immediate evidence from the side of the object³³. If intuitive cognition were applicable to the kind of knowledge of God we have in our present pilgrim state,

²⁷ See the whole discussion in *Ord.* I d. 2 pars 1 q. 1-2, and *Rep.* prol. q. 2. 3.

²⁸ *Ord.* I d. 2 n. 25. 34-36; d. 3 n. 56-57. 64; *Rep.* prol. q. 3 n. 4; *Quodl.* q. 7 n. 8; q. 14. n. 10.

²⁹ *Ord.* II d. 3 q. 9 n. 6: «Et, ut brevibus utar verbis, primam [cognitionem] voco abstractivam, quae est ipsius quiditatis secundum quod abstrahitur ab existentia actuali et non-existentia; secundam, scilicet quae est quiditatis rei secundum eius existentiam actualem, vel quae est [rei] praesentis secundum talem existentiam, voco cognitionem intuitivam: non prout intuitiva distinguitur contra discursivam, quia sic aliqua abstractiva esset intuitiva [ut cognitio principii], sed simpliciter intuitiva, eo modo quo dicimur intueri rem sicut est in se».

³⁰ *Ord.* I d. 1 n. 10. 12; II d. 3 q. 9 n. 7.

³¹ *Ord.* II d. 3 q. 9 n. 6. 7; III d. 14 q. 3 n. 7.

³² *Quodl.* q. 13 n. 11.

³³ *Ord.* I d. 1 n. 66-67; d. 2 n. 394; d. 3 n. 41-42. 64; II d. 9 q. 2 n. 29; III d. 14 q. 3 n. 6; *Quodl.* q. 7 n. 8; q. 13 n. 8. 9; q. 14 n. 10.

it could be only of the imperfect kind, without the immediate, evident presence of the object. On the other hand, there are two kinds of objects giving rise to knowledge in the human understanding, a natural object and a voluntary or supernatural object³⁴. In the case of the natural object the mind of man knows it necessarily by the mode of casuality, but God is not present to us or known by us in that way. In the case of a voluntary or supernatural object the mind of man can come to knowledge of it only through its willed activity in making itself known and not through any natural relation of the mind to it. This is the only way in which we can know God, as a voluntary and not as a natural object³⁵. That is to say, man's knowledge is contingent upon the divine Will, so that when man knows God a moment of the will is involved both on the part of God and on the part of man - thus knowledge involves, 'as St. Augustine indicated, a mutual relation between the knower and the object known'³⁶. However, when within this relationship the mind of man encounters the reality of God in His self-manifestation it cannot withhold its assent to the truths which it apprehends³⁷. The will and the mind both have their proper functions to perform in the act of knowledge³⁸, but once the object is presented to the mind in the divine manifestation the mind is compelled to think in accordance with it in the same way as in the knowledge of a natural object³⁹. In knowing God, therefore, we do not *have* to know Him in the same way in which we *have* to know natural objects when we know them, but we do come under the compelling claims of His reality and cannot avert acknowledgment of it when He reveals Himself to us. We may err but even in error there is an inescapable acknowledgment of His Reality.

³⁴ *Ord.* prol. n. 64-65; I d. 1 q. 1-4; *Quodl.* q. 13. 14.

³⁵ *Ord.* prol. n. 64-65; I d. 3 n. 56-57.

³⁶ *Ord.* prol. n. 72: «Dico quod cognitio dependet ab anima cognoscente et obiecto cognito, quia secundum Augustinum, IX *De Trinitate*, cap. ultimo, 'a cognoscente et cognito paritur notitia'». Also I d. 3 n. 486-493; II d. 3 q. 8 n. 17.

³⁷ *Ord.* II d. 6 q. 2 n. 11; cf. I d. 1 n. 38-41. 51.

³⁸ *Ord.* prol. n. 324-328; I d. 17 n. 206-207; II d. 1 q. 1 n. 23; IV d. 49 q. 10 n. 2; *Rep.* IV d. 49 q. 2 n. 14.

³⁹ *Ord.* I d. 1 n. 91-92; II d. 6 q. 2 n. 11; d. 42 q. 4 n. 5. 10. 11. 12; *Rep.* II d. 42 q. 4 n. 7. 13; *In Metaph.* IX q. 15 n. 6; *Quodl.* q. 16 n. 6.

Now the kind of relation which this involves for man in his knowledge of God is determined by the nature of the divine object as well as by the mode in which that object is presented to his knowledge. In the thought of Duns Scotus it is the nature and the mode of the Being of God as *personal* that is all-important here. It will be sufficient to recall his criticism and correction of the Boethian notion of *persona* in which Duns followed up the teaching of Richard of St. Victor⁴⁰. The difficulty with the Boethian notion was that it was logically derived through abstraction of essence from existence; it presented to Duns the same problem as that in the logicalisation of the concept of being. Thus for Duns the proper notion of the person, derived from reflection upon the Holy Trinity⁴¹, is at once a relational and an ontological notion, for the relationship is not just a determination of our understanding (*aliqua relatio rationis*) but an inherent and ontological determination of personal existence⁴². Logico-abstractive acts of knowledge are unable to reach this, and so prevent us from knowing God in accordance with His own personal mode of Being⁴³ - hence we have to speak of knowledge of God as personal Being in some form of intuitive knowledge, if only in the imperfect kind⁴⁴.

Now this involves some difficulty within the orbit of Duns' thought, especially when we ask how in these circumstances there can be any form of certain, and therefore of scientific, knowledge in theology. Duns admits that on the one hand true knowledge of God must be in accordance with the nature and mode of His Being as Personal and therefore involve a real and actual relation (*relatio realis et actualis*) to Him as its proper object, but on the other hand he also admits that we cannot have an intuitive knowledge of God as an actually present object, immediately and evidently grounded upon it, for that would take us beyond the condition of this present life⁴⁵. Duns' way of dealing with this is to distinguish between different levels of knowledge which are related, trans-

⁴⁰ *Ord.* I d. 23 n. 15; *Rep.* I d. 23 q. un. n. 7; *Quodl.* q. 3 n. 17.

⁴¹ *Rep.* I d. 25 q. 2 n. 5. 6. 7. 14; *Quodl.* q. 3 n. 3.

⁴² *Ord.* I d. 4 n. 11-13; *Rep.* I d. 25 q. 2 n. 5. 14; d. 26 q. 5 n. 5; *Quodl.* q. 3 n. 4. 6. 9; q. 4 n. 20; q. 19 n. 20.

⁴³ *Ord.* II d. 3 q. 9 n. 6.

⁴⁴ *Ord.* III d. 14 q. 2 n. 6; q. 14 n. 7.

⁴⁵ See *Quodl.* q. 7 n. 8; q. 13 n. 11, and cf. *Ord.* IV d. 14 q. 3 n. 6.

logically, as it were, by the fact that God remains for knowledge at all levels its one proper object. In one particularly interesting passage he speaks of five levels or *gradus cognitionis de Deo*:

«Sciendum quod quinque sunt gradus cognitionis de Deo. Prima et suprema est intuitiva, quam semper habuit de essentia divina Deus sub ratione deitatis. Secunda est cognitio de obiecto non intuitive cognito, sed distincte cognito per aliquod repraesentativum subiecti. Tertia, quae est obiecti non praesentis intellectui, nec in se, nec in alio repraesentativo, sed immediate creata a Deo, quae non subest actui voluntatis, quae tamen non est evidens ex obiecto. Quarta cognitio est illa quae opitulatur piis et defenditur contra impios ut cum Litterae sensus cognoscitur, et unus locus Litterae per aliam exponitur, et persuasiones adducuntur, et contra impios defenditur. Quintus gradus est simplicium, cuius cognitionis certitudo subest actui voluntatis, et haec cognitio est habita per fidem»⁴⁶.

It is the first of these that is all-important, the primary and supreme level of intuitive knowledge which God has of Himself in which He is His own completely adequate and proportionate Object. It is from this that everything else derives and upon this that ultimately all the different levels of theological knowledge depend, for as their primary object it contains in itself all the truths and is the evidence for all true theological propositions. Duns speaks of this supreme level of knowledge in God as *theologia in se*, the pure science of theology as it is in God, which he contrasts with *theologia in nobis*, or such knowledge as our understanding can have of that object⁴⁷.

In us theology is an imperfect science, at least if science is thought of *more geometrico* all on one logical level, for theology does not involve the evidence, necessity and certainty that are required for a strict science in this sense. *Nostra theologia* is concerned with contingent as well as necessary propositions and with principles that are not self-evident to our natural reason⁴⁸. Nevertheless since the material content of our theology derives from God's operations which are necessary, certain and evident in Him, theology can be a science on *our* level through relation to science as it is in itself on *God's* level, and as such the normal scientific

⁴⁶ *Rep. prol. q. 2 n. 17.*

⁴⁷ *Ord. prol. n. 141. 168; De primo princ. c. 4 n. 36.*

⁴⁸ *Ord. prol. n. 150. 168-171.* As examples of contingent propositions Duns gives, «Deus creat», «Filius est incarnatus». See further prol. n. 171.

activity is in place in which we clarify our apprehension of the object in a complex of consistent and necessary relations which remains valid, independent of our changing experience in this world. In other words, theology regarded as a science is not complete or consistent in itself, but does have completion and consistency through relation to the higher level of knowledge in God. Regarded in this way theology is called by Duns a *scientia practica*⁴⁹, not simply because it is some sort of applied science concerned mainly with faith, hope, and love, but because it functions in a series of *gradus cognitionis de Deo* in which every lower level is directed to its supreme end (*ultimus finis*)⁵⁰ in God and His knowledge of Himself, and so is concerned more with *intellectus principiorum* than with *intellectus conclusionum*⁵¹. *Scientia practica* means that *theologia in nobis* serves and tends towards *theologia in se, in Deo*. It is *directive* and *ostensive* toward that end.

Now when we ask how these levels of theological knowledge are related, we have to return to the fact that God makes Himself the voluntary or supernatural object of our knowledge through an act of condescension in which He manifests Himself to us. God comes to us as one who stands over against us in His incommunicable personal Being but who wills to reveal Himself to us, while we on our part are placed in a position where *obedience* is required of us, i.e. a movement of will and understanding in which we submit our minds to His Truth and come under the compulsion of that which God is. God is here *volens et agens* in His relation to us and that results on our part in an *aptitudo obedientiae ad dependendum per actionem agentis supernaturalis*⁵². It is within this experience and knowledge that theology is a *scientia practica*, or *sapientia*⁵³.

If we ask further how God makes Himself known to us and makes Himself the object of our knowledge, Duns answers that, in addition to revealing Himself to us obliquely through His effects in the created world, God reveals Himself to us in the Holy

⁴⁹ *Ord.* prol. n. 223.

⁵⁰ Cf. here the distinction between the secondary object and the primary object toward which it tends, *Ord.* I d. 1 n. 43; cf. also prol. n. 314-325.

⁵¹ *Ord.* prol. n. 210-212.

⁵² *Ord.* III d. 1 q. 1 n. 8, 9; *Quodl.* q. 19 n. 19; cf. prol. n. 94.

⁵³ *Ord.* prol. n. 210-212, 304, 314-323.

Scripture as He who only can name Himself and reveal Himself to us⁵⁴. Moreover God infuses into us inclination and faith toward Him. He draws an interesting distinction here between *fides infusa* and *fides acquisita*, both of which are necessary, if we are to receive and assent to the truth of His revelation⁵⁵. It is through the hearing of faith that theology acquires its proper material content upon which it can then set to work in a scientific manner⁵⁶:

«Igitur theologia nostra de facto non est nisi de his quae continentur in Scriptura, et de his quae possunt elici ex eis»⁵⁷.

So far we have been considering the notion of intuitive and abstractive knowledge in the thought of Duns himself, but now I would like to offer some comments upon it in the light of later thought which helps us to discern its strength and its weakness.

In the hands of William of Occam intuitive and abstractive knowledge became sharply divided through his logical distinction between significative meaning and suppositional meaning. This had a good effect in enhancing the status of contingent propositions but a bad effect in forcing a cleavage between faith and reason. Like Duns Scotus, Occam emphasised the reality of singulars and rejected the distinction between essence and existence, but in rejecting the notion of 'images in the middle' (the fictitious *species repraesentantes*) he advanced to a more empirical realism, at least on one side of his thought. Intuitive knowledge, he held, is the immediate awareness of an object caused by that object and not by another, knowledge by which it can be known whether it exists or not and in which the mind cannot fail to attain truth unless it is obstructed. It arises out of our immediate experience of reality and is the ground for all evident knowledge. Thus statements of *scientia realis* are held to be evidenced when they are

⁵⁴ *De primo princ.* c. 1 n. 1; see especially the first two parts of the Oxford Comm. on the *Sentences*, «De necessitate doctrinae revelatae» (*Ord.* prol. n. 1), and «De sufficientia sacrae Scripturae» (*Ord.* prol. n. 95).

⁵⁵ *Ord.* III d. 23 q. 1 n. 10. 11; d. 25 q. 1 n. 9: «ideo necessario requiritur cum fide infusa fides acquisita ex auditu».

⁵⁶ Cf. the discussion in *Ord.* I d. 42 n. 1 on «Utrum Deum esse omnipotentem possit probari naturali ratione?» where he draws a distinction between a proper theological approach, with its appropriate result in the content of knowledge, and a philosophical approach with its result in an appreciably different conceptual content. For the latter also see *Ord.* III d. 24 q. 1 n. 22.

⁵⁷ *Ord.* prol. n. 204.

grounded upon statements that things are as in fact they are intuited to be. When we find that this forced Occam to look in *motion* and even in *time* for the kind of *order in contingent events* noted by Duns, we realise the important part that was taken in the advance toward modern empirical science by the demand of Duns that we must know things in their actual existence and in accordance with their distinctive natures.

We may express the importance of this in another way, by recalling the basic questions in mediaeval scientific inquiry: *quid sit*, *an sit*, and *quale sit* in that order. In the radical change of approach from Aquinas to Duns there appears a tendency to make *quale sit* primary, but when that is put first before *quid sit* it becomes a very different question, and is indeed the new kind of question which had to be asked for a posteriori empirical science to arise, the question as to *actuality*, namely, 'What have we here'? Duns himself was not able to break free from the mediaeval *ordo quaestionis*, while Occam obstructed himself through a fatal element of subjectivity that damaged his appreciation of *scientia realis*.

Occam understood first intentions as events in the soul that occur by way of response to the external world, and held that we have a clearer knowledge and a greater certainty regarding them than the external facts they signify. Second intentions are not events in the soul but are terms suppositing for first intentions, and as such involve a deliberate suspension of their significative function, that is, an 'intentional inexistence' of things. Second intentions are thus merely linguistic and logical facts that are meaningful only when conjoined with others through the mind's activity in syntactical and logical complexes, or 'fabrications', as Occam called them. Hence through this terminist logic Occam moved away from the empirical to the abstractive realm, even from the psychological to the linguistic, for all dialectic takes place through the mediation of proposition and terms (*mediante propositione et mediantibus terminis*). This had far-reaching effects, for it led Occam to hold that in any science, real or rational, we know only propositions and deal exclusively with propositions as such.

To see its effect upon theology we have to recall his view of abstractive knowledge, as that by which something is apprehended

not as it is in itself but through abstraction from its existence or through a species abstracted from other things. This kind of knowledge does not import evidence. Hence unless God can be known intuitively or evidently, He cannot be known by us in any evident way. But Occam also held that it is possible to have an intuitive perception of something that does not exist or no longer exists like a 'dead' star; thus God is able to give us intuitive knowledge of something that has no existence and to grant us abstractive knowledge without any prior intuitive experience. This is the only kind of knowledge of God accessible to the *homo viator*. Now this had the effect of throwing faith and theology back upon certain revealed truths which God has provided for us by His absolute power, and upon certain creditive ideas that are providentially lodged in the tradition of the Church, that is, truths and ideas known *apart from* their real and rational ground - hence the only way in which faith and reason can be linked together is through the highly formalistic sciences of grammar and terminist logic. This was the root of the reactionary and authoritarian fideism that developed from the fifteenth into the sixteenth century.

In the light of this development we can see the immense importance of the way in which Duns Scotus worked out the relation between knowledge and being, and of his healthy awareness of the limitation of logical formalisation in the face of being. On the other hand, however, it reveals the menacing danger that lurks in the notion that we can have no intuitive evident knowledge of God in this present life.

We turn now to John Major who held Duns Scotus in the highest esteem, as the most distinguished former pupil of his own school at Haddington, and whom he sought to follow. Far from being a nominalist, Major made an extensive study of Occam, Holcot, Buridan, Godham, and others of that kind, in order to use their critical tools to establish a realist position like that of Duns, and this he reinforced through a more empiricist interpretation of Aristotle. But what interests us at the moment is his concern for the problem of intuitive knowledge, where he differed from most of his predecessors at a decisive point. Mediaeval *sententarii* used to discuss how God and the angels, and God and the *beati*, conversed. St. Thomas answered, wordlessly through pure vision, for unlike St. Anselm he identified *intelligere* and *dicere* in God. But

according the Major, who stood closer to Anselm, the converse of creatures with God in heaven is to be described as *videre in verbo*. Major's view here seems to have been strengthened by his study of John Reuchlin's little book *De Verbo Mirifico*, when he was commissioned along with others by the University of Paris to examine Reuchlin's works. At any rate Major advocated the notion of intuitive *auditive* knowledge (*intuitio auditiva* or *auditio intuitiva*), and held that a great deal of what we learn is derived through hearing rather than seeing.

This was a very significant moment in the history of thought, for it put a question to the way in which intuitive knowledge had been conceived on the analogy of vision. From this point of view it is possible to see that it was the primacy of vision that dictated the form of the question *quid sit* and the method of answering it through the abstraction of form. The visual mode of knowledge lends itself easily to abstraction of forms and patterns from objects, which can be considered independently of the objects and which are accessible to continual and permanent thought even when no empirical evidence for the objects remains. In the eyes of Duns Scotus, as we saw, this belonged to the essential nature of scientific activity, for forms of this kind can be organised and the implications of their intrinsic relations drawn out in such a way that the mind can be lifted up to necessary and infallible truths. But it was this that tied him down to the primacy of *quid sit* and prevented him from breaking through into the new kind of question that was needed, and it was the paradigm of visual knowledge that lay behind that. However, John Major showed that once we break through the exclusiveness of vision as the criterion of knowledge, an intuitive apprehension of God in accordance with His nature as Word is not only possible but compelling. Major himself could not break free altogether from abstractive processes of this sort, and declined to construe the kind of intuitive knowledge we have of God as a form of recognition or acknowledgment (*agnitio*) of rational content directly apprehended from God's Word.

This step was taken by John Major's pupil, John Calvin, who related it also to the teaching of Duns Scotus and Richard of St. Victor on the nature of the person in God and in ourselves, which Calvin learned through the teaching of Major himself. But it is

when we ask our final question, What of intuitive *evident* knowledge of God? that we see the real advance of Calvin's thought over that of Major and Duns, namely, in the way in which he related auditive knowledge of God through His Word to the immediate and actual presence of the divine Being in His Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not an emanation from God in which He is not personally and actually present, but God in His own ultimate majesty and being confronting man in His *modus essendi* as *Spirit* and therefore invisibly, and making Himself in the Word the immediate and evident object of man's intuitive knowledge. Through the Spirit it is the *prima Veritas* in His personal Being whom we meet and hear in the Word, *Deus loquens in persona*. The *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti* is not therefore some inner word in the soul of man, but what St. Anselm called the *intima locutio apud summam Substantiam*, which God makes us to hear in His Word and in hearing which we are given *intuitive evident knowledge* of God. This required, on the principles which Duns Scotus had laid down, a mode of inquiring appropriate to its nature, and so Calvin took the final explicit step of making the primary question in theological knowledge, *Qualis sit*, in which we start with actuality and not with abstract essence and possibility. But when he took that step modern positive theology was born.